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RAHAB

A D R A M A

RICHARD BURTON

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FROM

Ferris Greenolet.

RAHAB

RAHAB

*A Drama in
Three Acts*

BY
RICHARD BURTON

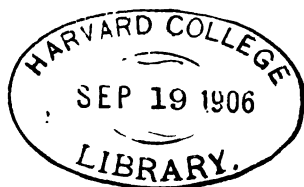
By faith the harlot Rahab perished
not with them that believed not, when
she had received the spies with peace.
—*Hebrews xi. 31.*



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1906

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Published March, 1906.

RAHAB

CHARACTERS

(In the order of their appearance)

AMMON, *a lover of Rahab*

LELA, *a harp player*

A SOOTHSAYER

A MESSENGER

RAHAB, *a woman of Jericho*

ZULEIKA, *her attendant*

SALMON, *a prince of Israel, sent by Joshua as
a spy*

HOREB, *a companion spy*

ZEMAN, *a soldier of Jericho*

AMORAH, *mother of Rahab*

ASENATH, *sister of Rahab*

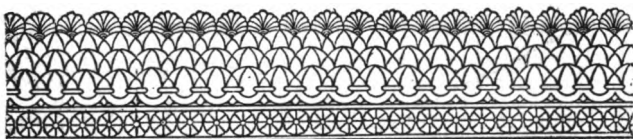
NATHANIAH, *Rahab's father*

*Pleasure makers at Rahab's house, soldiers of
Jericho, Israelites, etc.*

*The whole action occurs in Jericho, capital city
of the Canaanites, about 1500 B. C.*

ACT I.

'Behold when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father and thy mother and thy brethren and all thy father's household home unto thee. And it shall be that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be upon our head, if any hand be upon him. JOSHUA ii. 18-19.



RAHAB

ACT I.

A *MORNING in late Summer ten days before the siege. Scene, a large living-room in Rahab's house, on the wall; lattice-work at back, with open doors giving on to the wall, whence one overlooks the city of Jericho seen from an elevation. Doors, draped with rich hangings, and flanked by marble pillars, at right and left. The room is a beautiful one: marble floor with great oriental rugs: tropical plants about: ornaments in bronze and iron,*

gold and silver. A marble fountain playing in back centre. On either side of it, images of Baal, Ashtoreth, Moloch, and other gods of the Phœnician tribe of Canaanites. Curtain discloses a group of men and maidens surrounding fountain; they circle and dance to music of harps and citherns played by several girls sitting on marble benches placed along sides of the room. As each dancer comes in front of an idol, he or she makes an obeisance. On conclusion of dance, the women sportfully toss up water from the fountain at the men, who make as if to embrace them.

AMMON.

[coming down stage and addressing others, who follow and begin to take seats on the marble settles.

Well footed, by our gods!

FIRST WOMAN.

To dance is sweet;

To love—is sweeter.

AMMON.

Love us then, fair maid!

SECOND WOMAN.

Thy feet are light, and light thy vows of faith—
Rahab said so, last night.

AMMON.

The maiden Rahab!
Where stays she, as we while the sun-fierce hours
Here in her pleasure house?

FIRST WOMAN.

Among the palms
And cypresses she walks apart: for she
Is sad of late, nor joins our revellings
Nor bows her head to mighty Baal (*all bow*)
nor likes,
As once she did, to listen to the song
Made to her honour by our poet player.

[*Points to girl with harp.*]

AMMON.

What song is that?

FIRST WOMAN.

Hear it, if so you will:

Lela, thy harp : our mood is all for music.

[LELA *takes harp and sings, the rest grouping themselves picturesquely around her on benches and floor.* AMMON *a little apart.*]

SONG.

Rahab is queen of love ; her dress
Betrays the beauty claspt within :
Her mouth is made for tenderness ;
Men lose their souls, her grace to win :
She stands like a pomegranate tree,
Straight, beautiful, and proud to see.

The warm dusk-splendour of her eyes
Might wreck the councils of a king ;
Not statelier the Jordan flies
Than do her feet in pleasuring :
She doth enthrall with magics three :
With doubt, and hope, and glamoury.

Then strike rich chords of pain and bliss
 For Rahab, rose of Jericho :
 A regal flower to pluck and kiss
 And woman's bitter-sweet to know :
 In all the lists of coquetry,
 None walks so wonderful as she.

AMMON.

The song is meet : I would that she were here !

[A noise is heard outside which all heed.]

SECOND WOMAN.

Look ! Some one comes—a motley figure, too.

[A SOOTHSAYER rushes in breathless, by the door that leads from the wall. He is clad in black and red; cabalistic ornaments are on his long robe and conical hat. A mirror wrapt in rich velvet depends from his neck by a golden chain. He carries a tripod in one hand. All surround him at the centre.]

SOOTHSAYER.

Harbourage, and the chance to read the stars!
I can interpret signs.

FIRST WOMAN.

In nick of time,
A soothsayer! We'll have him riddle us
The issues of the Autumn. Some men say
Dark omens overbrood the city.

SECOND WOMAN.

Now,
Foretell the future, mystic sir, and gain
In good red gold.

THIRD WOMAN.

Yea, peddle us thy dreams
And divinations.

SOOTHSAYER.

Straightway will I so.
Dwells Mistress Rahab here? Yon motley mob
Handled me roughly till I cried for help,
Whereat they jeered: "Go, seek it there of
Rahab;

She medicines the men."—Their laughter shrilled
About mine ears, as hitherward I rushed.

FIRST WOMAN.

Yea, this is Rahab's house.

SOOTHSAYER

(*obsequiously*).

I know her fame,
And fain would please her; yea, and please ye all.

AMMON.

Bring us some luck in love.

ONE OF THE MEN

(*jeeringly*).

Thou mighty sage,
Pray, guess for me why Lela yonder goes
O' nights in moon-blanced ways, alone and
sad—

For my sake, or Astarte's? Speak it forth,
I'll halve this circlet with thee.

[*Points to gold armring.*

LELA.

Better say,
Why on *his* face a red mark like a clover

Burns since two days—or like a woman's hand!
Come, conjure that!

[All laugh.]

SECOND WOMAN.

Sir wise man, tell us of
The Israelites men say would leap our walls
And reave away us women.

ONE OF THE MEN.

Old wives' tales!
Handful of desert men!

SOOTHSAYER.

Good lords and dames,
Humbly I thank ye: I would pleasure ye,
Yet can but read within the wondrous glass
Whatso the mid-air gods decree; I am
Their slave, and nothing do of mine own will.
Gentles, approach.

[All gather nearer him. He sprinkles red powder on brass plate, lights it, and as steam arises, peers into the glass which he has set up on the tripod, and recites:

I see the years unroll. I hear a voice:

[His voice changes to a sort of incantation.]

Behold, the doomed city razed to earth,
Her idols tumbled, and her teeming ways
Vacant, and all her noise of moving men
Gulfed into silence.

[Pauses, peers into mirror, bending low. The others take announcement with signs of displeasure.]

Lo, the picture fades.

Now . . . only can I see a woman—
fair

As the white foam that tops the sea; her eyes
Are star-bent: all about her, ranged in ranks,
Throng saints and sages and the mighty ones
Whose deeds make nations; and they hail and
hail

The woman: trumpet-clear their hailings rise,
And more than flute-sweet: it would almost seem
She is some prophetess or saviour—ah,
Now fleets it forth—the vision is no more.

[All are impressed; they look at each other, whisper together. The SOOTHSAYER goes from one to another, receiving largess of money or ornaments; then, counting his gains, takes tripod, and goes towards left.]

AMMON

(checking him).

Small sport in this!—Hold, tell us livelier things:

Unless thy wave-lithe maiden come to earth,
Little we reckon of women in a dream.
I lust for dance or war or dainty love,
Nay, most of all, for Rahab. Gods! one look
Out of her eyes would break a holy vigil,
Warming it into human. Tell us, sir,
If I shall have her! Riddle me of her,
My queen of passion!

FIRST WOMAN.

Maybe he did speak

Of her, of Rahab—for 'tis known her mind
Is set on prophecies, nor leans toward love.

AMMON

*[With a great laugh, letting go
SOOTHSAYER, who goes to entrance at left, pausing there
and hidden behind a statue of a
god.]*

Rahab the wanton ranged about by saints!
Daughter of joy become a priestess! Nay—
A million nays! The fool did well to flee.

*[Sound of trumpet outside: clank
of armour, growing louder: enter King's MESSENGER at right;
looks about inquiringly.]*

MESSENGER.

I come from great Nathaniah, father to
The maiden Rahab, and the trusty friend
And councillor of our most potent King—
Long may his majesty secure our days! (*All
bow.*)

Where is she?

AMMON.

We await her coming now.

Look not at me as though I were her keeper!

Summon her household,—though, I warrant
thee,

They will not meddle with her morning mood.

Rahab, the turbulent, would be alone!

MESSENGER.

I cannot stay, for stern the bidding is:

The citizens must cease from revelry,

Turn low their lights, their houses set in order,

Lest enemies should catch us unaware.

Rumours are all abroad: Nathaniah

Would have his daughter heed them, make her
haunts—

Full now of license and of foolish mirth—

Less boisterous, and more safe: here is his sign.

(Hands King's signet to AMMON.)

AMMON.

The Signet of the King! His rule be long!

I'll give it her. But it is passing strange,

Our King, the conqueror of a score of towns,

Should fear these tramping tribes of alien men
Whose fame is bruited as if mastery
Shot from their very eyes: our walls are builded
For foes far weightier.

MESSENGER.

Not mine to say.

I do my hest: obedience is my trade.

[Exit, bowing, at right, as he came.]

FIRST WOMAN.

Grey, ominous times! If Rahab would but come,
Mayhap she'd make this criss-cross smooth and
clear.

SECOND WOMAN

(up stage, looking off, and pointing).

Then ask her, for she walks as though her eyes
Read all fate's secrets.

FIRST WOMAN.

O the masks of her!

Look, how she comes!

ALL.

Hail to the mistress Rahab!

[All rise and salute, musicians strik-

ing chords on instruments, as RAHAB, followed by her hand-maiden, ZULEIKA, enters at the left, and inclining her head to them, walks slowly up stage to latticed window and looks forth over the city.

SOOTHSAYER

(peering out).

She's my dream-lady!—Rahab ringed by saints!

[Goes out.]

RAHAB.

Good morrow to you all.

AMMON

(to Zuleika).

What ails the lady?

Surely she lacks of health?

ZULEIKA.

Sombre her mood;

She looks beyond the Jordan, and her dreams
Are much of stranger-folk—the tribe men say

Are camped beyond the river and may come
To conquer our great city—idle boast!

ONE OF THE MEN.

Nathless, I hear that Rahab's father begs
The King to strengthen all the guards, and close
The triple-headed gates before the sundown.
Strange men, 'tis whispered, walk our streets.

ANOTHER MAN.

'Tis said

A band of merchants Egypt-bound did see,
But two leagues from our walls, the Israelites
Riding lean stallions.

AMMON.

Let them come apace!

[Approaches RAHAB at window.]

Will not our Rahab listen to her slave?
Why is her glad behaviour clouded o'er
By stormy brows and listless looks?

RAHAB.

I am

Not well: it jars against my very soul
To hear yon revelry.

AMMON.

They loll and dote
And fawn upon thee as do festering weeds
About some crimson bloom.

RAHAB.

Lip service, Ammon !

AMMON

(offering her the King's signet).

Nay, burning truth. Thy father bids thee make
Thy house all dark and silent.

RAHAB

(taking ring).

Wherefore so?

My father ! Yet no father, for he sets
His face against me, treats me as a trull,
Not like a daughter. Ah, he has full cause !
Yet he might love me,—love me back again,
For that I love him so ! Why should I make
My house a sepulchre these splendid days ?
Though all the gods do know my heart is sad—
As sad as Ashtoreth when vintage fails ;
Yea, liker mourning than such merriment.

AMMON.

The King forefears some peril to the city.

RAHAB

(as if in a reverie).

Dear, sparkling city, must my dream come true?
Must Jericho go down?

AMMON

(seizing her hands, trying to embrace her).

My glorious girl,
I love thy moods—

RAHAB

(resisting him).

Unhand me, Ammon! I
Would break with my old life.

AMMON.

No, by the moon,
Thou still art mine, as thou hast been of yore!

RAHAB.

Never again, albe my flesh yet quivers
With the old passion, burns to feel thy touch:
Never again my soul shall give consent

To lechery. I swear it by the God
Of Israel!

AMMON

(astounded).

No god of love is that:
Some one bewitches thee.

RAHAB.

Yea, 'tis a spell

Ineffable; it bids me be myself,
My own young self, when not my lips alone
Might smile, but in my heart was laughter sweet;
And when my sister greeted me, mine eyes
Looked level into hers.

[To all, advancing to them.

Women and men

Of Jericho, now give me leave to speak
Alone, with my handmaiden; for there is
Business betwixt us robs me of my mirth.

*[All rise and slowly file out at sides,
with shrugs and whispered
words. AMMON starts to go,
then comes back and attempts to*

put hands upon her. She draws dagger.

RAHAB.

A dagger and a death-dream! Hear me swear it,
By the One God!

AMMON

(incensed).

You're but a freakish fool.

I'll wait; the famished flesh will call again.

A woman with one god—and many loves!

(Exit, laughing, after others.)

[RAHAB takes Zuleika by arm, and
goes rapidly to a stone seat;
both sit.

RAHAB

(rapidly, with emotion).

Oh, how I hate their wantonness; they are
Mere butterflies that sport them in the sun
Of license, dying at the feel of night,
Wherein are stars that search the soul.

ZULEIKA.

My mistress,

What means this change has come upon thee, so
Killing thy taste for gladness?

RAHAB.

Hast thou heard,
My girl, of a great people that men say
Do gather round us and will come to conquer
This populous city?

ZULEIKA.

Moloch make them ashes!
By name called Israelites: a mighty folk
That worship one strange god—

RAHAB.

Strong with His strength.
Zuleika, hark. Last night I had a dream,
Being o'erwatched and weary. In my sleep
I stood upon the battlements, and lo!
It seemed this town was razéd to the ground,
With all its peoples and its palaces
Prone, and its erstwhile buzz of traffic still.
And then, upon the leavings of our life
'(All happened as a mist before my gaze)
Arose fair buildings, and the sound of prayer;

And priests did chant JEHOVAH—such the
name—

And like a flash I knew it for the truth
And fell in worship: for his realm was pure
And high (*bends closer*); and then, Zuleika,
stranger yet—

ZULEIKA.

What is it, lady? How thy colour pales!

RAHAB.

I heard the sound of singing, and methought
My name was spoken: out of empty air,
A voice declared that Rahab should become
Fruitful, and in the fulness of long time
Honoured to unborn ages; then there came,
As if all trumpets made of men were melted
In one bright blast that shook the very stars,
A wondrous noise,—a light,—and I awoke
Trembling; since when all ribaldry and lust
Sicken me, and I know that Israel
Is destined to succeed us.

ZULEIKA.

This is strange;

But, mistress, surely but an idle dream
Born of some feasting—out of mere excess
Of pleasure.

RAHAB.

Nay, my heart beats otherwise.

ZULEIKA.

Some conjuror hath fooled thee; 'tis their trade
To cozen women;—how may doom like that
Despoil our Rahab!

RAHAB.

Think not, girl, of me;
Think of our birth-stead, think of Jericho;
This city of the moon-gods, in a plain
Far-famous for its tilth; her date-palms rise
Under a sky that changes, hour by hour,
From spangled red to turquoise, and from opal
To the gold-blue of night. How can we die?

ZULEIKA.

It is a lovely land.

RAHAB.

Proud are we, too,
In traffic maritime: our traders fare

Loaden with costly stuffs and purple dyes
Phoenician; merchant-men seek out our wares,
Our goldsmiths and our silversmiths have art
Most excellent—

[Knock on door; both startled.]

RAHAB motions to ZULEIKA to open it. Latter draws aside curtains. Enter at the left, SALMON and HOREB, spies of Israel; the former is princely in bearing. Both seem out of breath. They salute the women. Their dress, of sombre colour, is sternly simple, in marked contrast with the luxury-loving inhabitants of Jericho. They seem like hardy plainsmen.

RAHAB.

Can we be ne'er alone!

[RAHAB and ZULEIKA withdraw a little and regard the two strangers.]

ZULEIKA.

Some wily Babylonians, sleek of tongue,
Fooling us out of treasure.

RAHAB.

Rather seem they
Men of the plain, girt up for arduous quests.

SALMON (*to RAHAB*).

Lady, thy pardon. We are travellers,
Our home beyond the river : footsore, starved,
We crave but food and drink, an hour of rest,
Ere we take up our journey.

RAHAB (*to ZULEIKA*).

Fetch in food
And drink.

[ZULEIKA *goes out*.]

As strangers, ye are welcome here.
My name is Rahab.

SALMON.

Lady, mine is Salmon,
And this is Horeb. Marvellous the land
That breeds such women, large of heart, I see,

And lovely as the desert's dim mirage
To one half dead for water.

[Re-enter ZULEIKA, two slaves following with food and drink, which is placed at left back; the slaves then retire.]

RAHAB.

Pray eat, good sirs.

Your looks are haggard.

[Both sit and eat. SALMON looks repeatedly at RAHAB; HOREB is also struck by her beauty. RAHAB and ZULEIKA confer together; then RAHAB goes towards the window, and SALMON joins her. ZULEIKA and HOREB together at the table.]

HOREB.

Fair thy mistress is;

Fairer her handmaiden.

ZULEIKA.

In love and war,

All men are one: alike for fond or fierce,
Alien, and those of Jericho.

HOREB.

Nay, nay,
In war and love my countrymen are swift
As dread monsoons that cloud the eye of day
And bury it in sand.

ZULEIKA.

But fickle, like
Mid-desert fountains, dry when most the need
Of living water.

HOREB.

Wine thou art, not water.

[*Tries to seize her.*]

RAHAB
(to SALMON).

Thou art sufficed: then I will leave thee.

SALMON.

Stay!

Leave me not yet. Lady, there is a thirst
Not of the body, but whereby the soul
Is mad for drink. Now in thine eyes I quench

That torture, and thy presence makes me strong.
Stay, that both soul and body nourished be.

*[RAHAB halts reluctantly; then
seats herself, while ZULEIKA
goes up stage with HOREB.
Faint sound of horn heard out-
side. SALMON starts at it, and
hastens to confer with HOREB,
who tries to hold him back.*

SALMON.

Nay, hold me not: it is our only chance
To gain her goodwill; else like dogs we die.
And, by our tribe, I love her!

HOREB.

By our tribe,
That is no marvel, for she breeds men's love
As rivers run and grass grows.

SALMON

(comes quickly to RAHAB).

We are men
Of Israel, across the Jordan sent
By Joshua, great leader of our folk,

To spy the land. Yon horn means danger,
death

To us, unless thou haply hidest us twain
From capture.

RAHAB.

Treason? Traitors in my house?
Summon the guard!

[HOREB and ZULEIKA, *who are
seated, at the rear, rise.*

SALMON.

Hear me a moment more.
Rumour hath mumbled of a certain maid
Of Jericho—Rahab by name—her life—

RAHAB (*aside*).

Ah, God, her life!

SALMON.

Late-turned to holy things,
Because our God calls to her soul of souls
With winsome words, yet strong: when that I
learned
How this house harboured her,—all desperate,

Hard-hunted, nigh to doom, my comrade here
 And I knew this our only chance: we knocked;
 Thou knowest the rest; I hoped that Israel's
 God

Would bid thee do a deed should save our lives
 And build his glory.

RAHAB

(*agitated*).

Yea, and build my shame—
 My everlasting shame! Think you this land
 Means nothing to me—home, and kin, and
 friends,

Bound by a thousand blood-ties, set at naught,
 And all for what? Two chance-come stranger
 men

Would raze my city, proud among her palms,
 And set an alien people, where of old,
 From immemorial times the Canaanites
 Have lived at quiet!—'Twere an outlaw deed!

[*Horn louder outside.*

HOREB.

Danger, Prince Salmon! Danger!

SALMON.

'Tis the guards!

Haply, O lady, I may seem to speak
But for myself,—my country, and my cause.
But I have looked upon thy face,—none such
In Israel!—fed me at thy gaze: I beg
Now, not for me, but thee—

RAHAB.

What mean'st thou? Speak!

SALMON.

It is ordained by God, through Joshua,
This Jericho shall fall by fire and sword.
For seven days—so spake the Lord of Hosts
To Joshua—the city shall be compasséd;
But on the seventh, it shall come to pass
Seven trumpets of rams' horns shall blow
Long blasts, and Jericho's so mighty walls
Fall flat, and all thy doomed folk go down
To utter desolation.—Save us two,
That we may carry back the news, and thou
And all thy kin shall be passed o'er, alone,
Of all the place: this, by my faith, I swear!

RAHAB

(wonderingly).

An horn blast? Not a touch of mortal blows,
And our deep-founded walls, massy and ancient,
Shall crumble like the plaything of a child?

SALMON.

Even so.

RAHAB.

How may my house, now firmly set
Here on the wall, escape such overthrow
And ruin?

SALMON.

Miracle to miracle
Added: thy house and its foundation wall
Shall stand unhurt, even as thy family
Shall unharmed hide.

RAHAB

(as if to herself).

My kin, my helpless mother,
My old, grey father, and the cosset-lamb,
My sister, she—there's torture in thy tongue!

SALMON.

I ask it, too,—because I love thee, Rahab;
Would save thee for myself,—not for our God
Alone, but with the worship of my body
Consecrate to high uses.

RAHAB

(slowly, wonderingly).

Thou dost love?

Ah, wert thou of my folk—

SALMON.

Be thou of mine!

Thou *shalt* be mine, until the end of days.*[He approaches, as if to lay hands
on her.]*

RAHAB.

I am dazed.—Nay, touch me not, not like the
others.

[She suddenly kneels to him.]

Lay thy two hands upon my hair: the first
Caress in years that lacks of fierce desire,
And feels like tenderness. I know a virtue

Went forth from thee to me: the spokesman
thou
Of thy great God.

SALMON.

And thy true lover, Rahab!

(The horn winds again.)

Again the horn! What is thy will to do?

*[Takes a jewel from a girdle at his
side.*

Here is a gem of talismanic worth,
Long in my keeping; treasure it as life
Is treasured.

RAHAB.

How it throbs with luminous lights!

SALMON.

The graver graved it cunningly, and set
A wondrous word thereon: *Kismet*—'tis fate—
Token that we are plighted, e'en though war
Divide our peoples.

RAHAB

(looking at the gem).

'Tis a gift of price:

A white great pearl! I lay it on my heart.

SALMON.

Thy loveliness shall warm it. Legend saith
Its lustre dims if she who wears it wavers
From stedfast faith; give it me pure again,
Sweet with thy bosom, all its white undimmed
In life or death. (*The horn sounds again.*) The
horn sounds nearer, love!

RAHAB

(*to both men*).

Hark you. Take yonder way up to the roof.
There lie you down beneath the flax. I'll send
The guards a face-about.—You must not take
The river way; the fords are hazardous;
Now is the barley harvest, and the Jordan
Full to o'erflowing, and her banks do lave
The land on either side for fruitful miles,
Kissing it into bloom; hence, must you 'scape
North, to the mountains. From the wall I'll
hang

[*Looks about, snatches a red cord
from one of the idols.*]

This scarlet cord; thereby you may descend
Amidst the trees—and so, free, and away!

SALMON.

My portion death, if I this deed forget.
Hear me, Almighty God! That self-same cord,
Hung from thy dwelling when the siege is hot,
All Israel pressing close on Jericho,
Shall be the sacred sign to spare this house.
Let not one soul go forth from out thy door,
For whoso goes, shall die. Keep thou within;
My oath is sworn. Dear, we shall meet again
Beneath the cypresses, under the stars!

[Horn close at hand; knocking at door. RAHAB hurries them off at the right. Knocking continues. She hands ZULEIKA the red cord.]

RAHAB.

See that the cord is hung.

[Exit ZULEIKA, after the spies.]

[RAHAB goes to the opposite entrance, draws curtains back,

*opens door. Enter ZEMAN, and
half a dozen soldiers.*

ZEMAN.

No sign of them!

Lady, we seek two spies of Israel
Were seen to creep this way, nor go not hence:
Men desperate, and dangerous to the weal.

RAHAB.

Wore one, the larger of the two, a tunic
Tufted with purple?

*[Re-enter ZULEIKA, goes up stage,
and stands looking at RAHAB.]*

ZEMAN.

'Tis reported so.

RAHAB (*looking questioningly at ZULEIKA, who
nods*).

The men but lately left my door; they asked
Straitly for bread and water, then made off
By the right river path—thou canst not miss
them.

ZEMAN.

(suspicious and hesitating).

Lady, I would have warrant of thy word:

Thy way of life is talked of.

RAHAB.

Very like.

Convince thee. *(Shows King's signet.)* Look,
the Signet of the King!

[ZEMAN bends knee, kisses the Signet, and withdraws as he came.]

ZULEIKA.

The scarlet cord gleams from the window ledge.

Mistress, what hast thou done?

RAHAB.

O girl, in truth,

I scarcely know. Meseems that I obey

The Dream, the Vision.—Zeman have I foiled.

The men must take the mountain pass, there hide

Till search is o'er.

ZULEIKA.

O Rahab! the poor land!

RAHAB.

Cease, cease, thy words are stabs! Canst thou
not see

I do it for the God of Israel?

Or was it for my kinsmen? So I think.

My head goes round.—Nay, nay, I will not lie!

“Beneath the cypresses, under the stars”

I did it for my love, my love, my love!

[RAHAB *draws the pearl from her bosom, and kisses it, as curtain goes down. Sounds of trumpet without, growing fainter as pursuit of the spies dies in the distance.*

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

*Now Jericho was straitly shut up, because of
the children of Israel; none went out and none
came in. JOSHUA vi. 1.*

ACT II.

FIRST day of the siege. A superb afternoon in the garden of Rahab. A great central path leads up stage to steps by which one surmounts the wall from the city; richly chased metal seats about; flower-bordered side-paths, giving left on Rahab's house, right on wall. Tropical plants, idols of the gods in bronze and ivory amidst shrubbery. Effect of elevation above city, which glitters picturesquely in distance. Sounds outside from time to time implying disorder and danger.

Curtain discovers RAHAB sitting in a sad lethargy on metal seat. ZULEIKA, in the background, peers through palms, towards the city, then comes down and joins RAHAB.

ZULEIKA.

But yesterday, music and dance were rife,

And revel. Now, no sounds of singing come
From out the city: 'tis a woful change.
Our house is like a sepulchre.

RAHAB.

The King

Bade me to cease from pleasure. I obey:
My father's wish is sacred.

ZULEIKA.

Who would dream
That trouble brooded o'er a day so fair!

RAHAB.

'Tis wonderful; such weather should be sung
To sound of lutes.

[A faint sound from the city.]

ZULEIKA.

The city murmurs and moans.

RAHAB

(dreamily).

Sweet smells that come from gardens always
seem

As tokens there are spirits dwelling there
Better than mortal folk. I wonder, girl,

Hath Israel such odours?—Fancy-monger!
 How the birds sing! Siege and the havoc of war
 They rest above; their eyrie is the air,
 The trees their citadels and homes of peace.

ZULEIKA.

How canst thou babble of the birds! Thou
 hearest
 The gates assailed?

RAHAB.

I marvel at myself.
 I am as one that, desperately calm,
 Sits quiet o'er an earthquake; here am I
 Spent with my father-grief and riven by love,
 And fear, and hope—prating of gardens.—
 Fool! (*Rises.*)

How long ago the messenger went forth!
 'Tis time my kinsfolk came: go, look again,
 Zuleika.

ZULEIKA.

They have never come before;
 Maybe they will not now.

RAHAB

(bitterly).

Thou speakest truth!

Why should they come, indeed? I left them,
killed

Their pride in me. But Asenath and mother
Are women, and I think that they will come
Out of pure pity; and my father, led
By the King's signet, for I set the seal
Deep in the wax, and he will deem me one
The ruler favours and hath whispered some
State secret,—drugged by potions from love's
cup.

What seest thou? Aught of them?

ZULEIKA.

(looking off at the right).

They come, they come—

Thy mother and thy sister!

RAHAB.

But my sire,
He will not here, he shuns my house of mirth.
My father must be saved; I hear the words

Of Salmon ever: "Let no soul go forth
From out thy doors, for whoso goes shall die."

*[Enter, at the right, RAHAB's
mother, AMORAH, and sister,
ASENATH. They stand timidly
at entrance, looking about as if
in an unwonted place. RAHAB
hastens to embrace both, show-
ing especial tenderness for ASE-
NATH.]*

ASENATH
(falteringly).

Rahab, thou bad'st us.

RAHAB.

Dear ones, welcome here;
Welcome, my dear ones, welcome to my house.

AMORAH.

Thy father might not come.

RAHAB.

Yea, yea, I know.
He shuns me, shames to call me child. O God!

AMORAH.

Affairs of state compel him. . . .

RAHAB.

Cursed he not

His daughter?

ASENATH.

We would listen to no curse!

AMORAH.

He spake harsh words; but grief, not anger, lies
At bottom.

ASENATH.

But we knew thy heart was good;
Thou sentest for us in kindness—

RAHAB.

Oh, in love,

In utter love. (*Seats them at a settle. To ZU-
LEIKA, who goes out at the left.*)

Let them have wine and food
Prepared within; sweet drink and dainties too.
Dear hearts, I bade you come that I might feast
Mine eyes upon you; we must talk, we three,

About the city, sore beleaguéréd
With perils.

AMORAH.

Aye, how terrible! Thy father
Grows haggard with it; hardly have I slept
A wink these three nights, what with ominous
sounds
And pitfalls lurking in the open streets.

RAHAB.

Poor mother! Thou must needs have rest; and
now
Within my pleasaunce thou may'st safely lie.
The siegers gather before the gates of brass
Far on the city's further side; and here
We may look forth and glimpse the ways of war,
Our sight framed in by birds' nests.

[ZULEIKA *re-enters*.

AMORAH.

Thank thee, child.

RAHAB.

Zuleika, lead the lady to my chamber,
And let the door be guarded: thou must bide

The night: I cannot let thee go till morn.
Nay, till the day that Jericho is doomed.
(*Aside.*)

[ZULEIKA conducts AMORAH off,
into RAHAB's house. The sis-
ters sit, RAHAB drawing ASE-
NATH tenderly to her.

RAHAB

(to AMORAH, as she goes off).

Sleep tranquilly, my mother.—Little one,
I dared not tell our mother, but to thee
I will, for I would have thee understand
Why so insistently my messengers
Have urged thy coming, called my kinsfolk to
This haunt of license.

ASENATH.

Sister, say not so!

Dear Rahab, where thou goest is no shame.

RAHAB.

I doubt our mother might disburden all
My pack of news: she's waxen old, of late,

The years have loosed her tongue: my father's
wrath

Were loud and bitter, should I open wide
My heart, and spill its tidings. Listen, dear,
And let my words be buried in thy soul
As in a tomb.

ASENATH.

I will. O Rahab, I
Tremble, I know not wherefore.

RAHAB.

Hush, and hear.
'Twas yesterweek; two spies of Israel
Knocked at my door; from them I took the tid-
ings
That warrior folk who dwell beyond the Jordan,
Led by their mighty captain, Joshua,
Would soon lay siege before this Jericho
And raze it to the ground.

ASENATH.

Thou told'st the King—
Thou warned'st our father?

RAHAB.

Nay, I hid the spies.

ASENATH

(draws back in astonishment).

Thou hid'st our enemies?

RAHAB.

'Twas even so.

For I obey the living God; besides,
I loved the leader of the twain, a man
Noble, of princely mien.

ASENATH.

Thou loved'st—a foe?

I scarce can understand . . . but it was
right,

If Rahab chose to do it!

RAHAB.

Full of faith!

My Asenath, this city of our birth
Sinning light-heartedly beneath bright skies,
Is doomed—not by the hand of Joshua,
But of high God.—I saw it in a dream.

[Rises, recites as if in a trance.]

Our idols topple, luxury and lust
 Rule us, the very capitals upon
 Our temples—white pomegranates laced with
 leaves—

Are evil things, bespeak our ribaldry,
 Symbols of shame. This Jericho must fall . . .
 Must fall. . . .

ASENATH.

Oh, then our ruin is at hand!
 Why should our gods forsake sweet Jericho?

RAHAB.

Because her soul is dead; her body breathes
 Alone. I have been part of it, my flesh
 Partook of this corruption; I must save
 My soul;—it is a call that rings from God
 Above all city claims. If any place
 Help not the spirit in its climb toward God,
 'Tis no true mother.

ASENATH.

I know not of him,
 This God thou namest, but I soothly know
 That Rahab is my sister whom I love,

My Beautiful, whose words are wise and good,
Likewise her ways.

RAHAB.

Sweet, I will tell thee more :

I let a scarlet cord hang from the ledge,
And when the soldiers of the King were gone
Who sought the spies, straightway I lied to them.
The two of Israel escaped thereby;
But first they swear, whenso they should return,
My house alone of all among the dwellings
In Jericho, should 'scape the fire and sword, . .
That self-same cord the sign.

ASENATH.

Oh, now I see,

Thou bad'st us here—

RAHAB.

Since here is the sole place
Of safety, when our strongholds bite the dust.
These men of Israel are conquerors,
Sparing nor men nor women; nay, they kill
The old and young, and every manner of beast—
The sword-edge eats them.

ASENATH

(*huddling up to RAHAB*).

Rahab, can it be?

Oh, I will stay within, and so must thou;

But father,—he—

RAHAB.

Will forth on things of state,

Unless by sleight we hold him; thou must help.

They *shall* remain indoors; when Salmon spake

(Salmon he's called, I did not tell his name),

He said:

“Let not a single soul go forth

Across thy threshold, for who goes, shall die.”

And he will keep his promise, none shall die

Within our house,—though he, my warrior-

prince,

Haply may perish, haply long ere this

Forgets the moodful maid he sware it to,

My transient face slipt from his memory,

As to a seaman fades some obscure cape

That melts in mist. . . . No, he hath

faithful eyes—

Will keep his oath!

ASENATH.

Sweet sister, weep not so.

True lovers do not change.

RAHAB.

Dear innocence !

My soul has long been soiled ; so, sacrifice
Befits me : when the stormy hosts with rams
Batter the walls, and shrill the war-horse neighs,
To make the compact sure, then I will go
Out at the door to bid them stay their hands
Against my dear ones safely housed inside.
Salmon,—my God !

ASENATH.

Rahab, thou shalt not do it !

Thou must be safe for Salmon, he would guard
Thy dear head, sacredly, thou must not die.
I know our gods cry out for sacrifice,
Even of women and babes. The Jordan flood
Murmurs strange stories of the wretched ones
Doomed there to drown, or fed to Moloch's
maw ;
So old nurse Reba told me many a time,

Paling my blood. But thou art dear and good,
 And once a mage did come from far beyond
 The river, strangely garbed, and at our house
 He lodged; and when I said good-bye to him
 Early at morn, he looked full fatherly
 Upon me, and he said:

“My little one,
 Be good, for nothing evil e’er befalls
 The good.”

And thou art good, my sister, so
 Not meant to die.

RAHAB

(*dreamily*).

Salmon was tall, and wore
 A kind of grace about him like a garment:
 He drew my heart. . . . “Under the cy-
 presses,
 Beneath the stars!”

ASENATH.

It seems like the old time,
 When we did sleep together; ’twas thy wont
 To fold me close from cold, and tell me tales

Of heroes, and I thrilled to hear thee speak
So wondrously : and then—I know not why—
Thou vanished, and the happy days were done.
They told me thou wert worldly, wished no more
To see us—'twas untrue : but thou wert lost
To me, and I must do without my playmate,
Make mine own stories, dream my dreams alone.
But thou art here, and lov'st me.

RAHAB.

I remember

My father, on the very night I fled,
Did kiss me on the brow ; that one caress
Burned through a thousand lecheries, and kept
My tears aflow ; I loved him from that hour
Doubly.

ASENATH.

I, too, remember ; it was Spring.

RAHAB.

Each Spring that comes to light our dusty way,
Is like a dream of youth, freshening a world
Grown old and weary.

ASENATH.

It is Autumn now.

RAHAB.

Autumn, indeed. Ah, Asenath, those days
Seem to me very die-away and dim,
Like wind-bells in a temple, high above
Earth's troubling, with a music thin and sweet.
I must not dwell upon them.

*[The sound of the King's trumpets
outside. Enter AMORAH hur-
riedly from the house.]*

AMORAH.

Rahab, list!

'Tis the King's blast.—

ASENATH

(aside to RAHAB).

The secret of the spies?

He knows—will seize us!

RAHAB.

Never fear of that!

None is aware in Jericho,—unless
Horeb should leak it like a pent-house roof.

AMORAH.

Displeasure not the King,—for he is quick
To wreak revenge.

RAHAB.

His King is on my side—
The august King of Kings. (*Aside.*)—Mother,
fear naught.

[*Enter NATHANIAH impetuously,
at the centre, followed by a
guard of half a dozen soldiers
of Jericho. He checks himself
on seeing RAHAB.*

NATHANIAH.

I come to one hath never passed our lintel
Since the dark day she left it to our shame.

RAHAB

(*approaches him with appeal in her eyes; her
voice is precative*).

But I rejoice that thou art come.

NATHANIAH.

Stand back!

I seek thy sister and thy mother.

RAHAB.

I

Am likewise sister, daughter,—and have begged
To have thee here—

NATHANIAH.

There's menace in the air,
The city shrinks and trembles: hostile spears
Are at her gates: famine, fire, and sword
Haply to-morrow overwhelm our homes.
Unlucky Canaan! Would our youngest born
Were dutiful! 'Twere comfort in this stress,
This carnage and confusion.

AMORAH.

Say not so.

Father, vent not harsh words; her heart is good;
Surely she sent for us in kindness, hath
Great news, of moment to our welfare.

ASENATH.

Aye,

Rahab is true, will help us.

NATHANIAH.

Day by day

Thou revellest as a wanton midst thy mates,
While this proud city is in travail sore,
And I beside the King to steer her course.
Curses upon thee! Barren be thy womb,
Milkless thy breasts! Unwillingly I came,
Unwilling stay.

AMORAH

(going to a statue of Baal and kneeling).

Ye gods, forgive our child,
And pity Jericho.

RAHAB.

I own my sin,
My giddiness; but I have bid thee come
In love and yearning. I would save thee!

NATHANIAH

(contemptuously).

How

May she save others, could not save herself?

RAHAB.

Because she knows the anguish of the lost!

NATHANIAH

(to soldiers, who fall back at his word).

I'll hear her : haply through some lover's blab
She learns the enemy's gin.

RAHAB.

Dear ones, I speak
Like any child.

NATHANIAH.

Thou that hast borne no child
To take our name, and prop our failing years !

RAHAB

(solemnly).

That time shall come.

*[Music plays softly, repeating main
motif in the song sung by LELA
in Act I., a barbaric, minor
strain of mingled wildness and
sweetness.]*

I bring a sweet, strange thing;
I carry not a child, but a great thought;
Big am I with its burden.

NATHANIAH.

Bring it forth.
Women like thee, 'tis said, look longingly

On babes at breast—that cannot be their own.

RAHAB.

Aye, that is sooth: Motherhood beckons me
Beyond a mist of blood, like a white flame!

[*Looks a warning to ASENATH.*

This Jericho is lost!

NATHANIAH.

Traitress, beware!

My sword will leap to light! Our walls still
stand,

And no man knows our fate.

AMORAH

(*goes to an idol*).

Oh, let us bow

Unto our gods, since they are masterful.

[*RAHAB rushes to her, and over-
throws the idol from its pedes-
tal; it crashes on to the floor.
The others instinctively draw
away.*

RAHAB.

Bend not the knee: these are the shrines of doom
Have dragged us down to slaughter and to death.

NATHANIAH.

So! Impious, too? Love-toy and idol-breaker!
This land of ours is specially watched o'er
By Baal and his consort Ashtoreth,
Giver of wine, great goddess of the Sun.
Darest thou mock at these?

RAHAB.

Father, I dare.

The sea hath wider ways than all the lands,
Vaster her realm: beyond the outmost isles
The old eternal wash. So of the soul.
Back of these idols broods the living One.
There is a God, beyond the Jordan now,
But speedily to come and cleanse this sty—
In whose right hand I rest.

NATHANIAH

(*sneeringly*).

What god is this,

A ruler over brothels?

RAHAB.

Father, scan

My face. Is there brute passion graved upon it?
I speak because—a vision bade me see
Our city's downfall.

NATHANIAH.

Vision? What, and where?

RAHAB.

Last night, for the third time, a solemn dream,
And our destruction shown as in a ball
Of crystal, clear, irrevocable, my house
Alone left upright.

NATHANIAH.

Whims and fancies all!

No time for further chatter. (*To AMORAH and*
ASENATH.) Let us hence!

RAHAB

(*with rising excitement*).

Leave thou these two behind, and come thyself
Within the week. I . . . may have
pregnant news

Upon the seventh day of siege . . . such
news

That thou wilt covet it, if it should chance
That Jericho's sore-straitened.

NATHANIAH

(signals to soldiers to follow).

Let thy news
Be more than dream-built. I will to the walls.
Stay ye, if so ye will; my time is wasted
In talk—farewell!

*[He goes out at centre down the
wall, followed by his guard.]*

*[RAHAB sinks into a seat, hiding
her face in her hands. ZULEIKA
enters hastily from the house.]*

ZULEIKA.

Lady, the Israelite is here, would have
An audience.

RAHAB.

The Israelite? 'Tis he. *(Aside.)*
'Tis Salmon! Bid him in.
(Goes to others.) Leave me now.

I must see one who brings me secret tidings

Of pith for Jericho.

[Hurries them into the house; then returns and nervously makes her dress and hair seemly.]

He comes, perchance,
To make me twofold sure he will remember
His words. His life's in peril, for the siege
Is nigh! But his high God, and mine, will watch
And ward away all evil.

[ZULEIKA ushers in HOREB from the house.]

Horeb! Thou?

HOREB.

Yea, lady,—I have come—

RAHAB.

Doubtless to see
Zuleika, though she may not wait thee now.

[Signs for ZULEIKA to withdraw, and the girl goes out towards the house.]

HOREB.

Nay, I am for her mistress!

RAHAB.

Not for me?

HOREB.

Even so, girl. (*Thrusts his hand into his bosom.*)

I bear within my breast—

RAHAB.

A message? Word from Salmon?

HOREB.

Nay, love's word!

Thy lover-lord's too busy with the spears

To dote on thee, and call thee *dear*: our hosts

Come but free-booting into Jericho,

And claim war-baggage: girls and gold and
gems,

And wines and scented woods.

RAHAB.

A dastard lie!

HOREB

(*Noises heard from the city.*)

Tigress, be tamed! Hark, to the shuddering
shock

Of broadswords; all the winy air
Hums like a mighty hive of golden bees
With arrows. Buoyed by the dream of thee,
My love put wingéd sandals to my feet,
Charming me hither. Fly, ere 'tis too late!

RAHAB.

Fly? Not with thee?

HOREB.

Who else can aid thee now?

I know a way that winds far underground,
Then threads the hills and, twisting serpentine,
Issues at the very foot of Lebanon;
Above are odorous cedars, a meet place
For trothing; let us leave this ill-starred city
And shout our loves under the shining stars
From a high hill!

RAHAB.

We build our altars there;
Nor use such places for flesh-fondlings, dog!

Back to thy master and thy duty; I
Am not for thee.

HOREB.

Thou art for Israel.

Thou said'st it, and I love thee.

RAHAB.

Love me—*thou!*

Call not lust love. Go, fight; thy country's cause
Summons her sons, brave in the battle press!

HOREB.

Love me thou shalt! What more can Salmon do
Than I, his mate?

RAHAB.

Thou never read'st my soul;

Thou art a stranger—go!

HOREB.

Leave thee, alone?

Not for a wedge of gold whose worth in weight
Is fifty shekels.—To the mountain, love!

[Seizes her roughly.]

RAHAB.

No man shall handle me save—

HOREB

(laughing; kisses her).

Horeb—so!

RAHAB.

Wouldst thou then hale me to thy trysting bed!
This is not conquering, but thieving, robber!

HOREB.

I come of a race of robbers! Arabs they
Who raped the harems of their foes, and swept
Like wind upon slim steeds across the desert,
Or camped with riotings beside some stream
Whose waters cooled their drunken bodies: now
I would reave thee!

RAHAB

(struggling).

Thou art so strong, so strong.

O Horeb, pity me! I am a woman
Of tempest nature; my unruly blood
Leaps madly to thy passion;—but my soul,
My soul cries, *Nay*.

HOREB.

To Lebanon, my love.

Rahab of Jericho!

RAHAB

(tears herself from him).

Not while I live
To struggle and to hate!

HOREB.

Thy peacock pride
Shall wilt, if I but open my sealed lips,
Tell of the red cord!

RAHAB.

What, tale-bearer too!
Are thus thy women won, most wonderful
Of tattlers?

HOREB.

Tattler, traitor? Thou shalt rue
The arrogant words. I go to spread the news
Shall land thee in a dungeon—

[HOREB turns to go, and is confronted by AMMON, who enters from the wall and blocks the way.]

RAHAB

(rushing to him).

Save me, Ammon!

AMMON.

What's this? An alien?

RAHAB.

Yea, an Israelite.

A spy, a traitor!

AMMON.

Traitor? Then he dies. (*Draws sword.*)

HOREB.

Not till I tell thee—

[ZULEIKA, *who has entered from the house just before, approaches from behind and places her hand over HOREB'S mouth.*

ZULEIKA.

Tell it in thy grave,

False son of Israel, unclean hanger-on!

The maid forsworn, thou wouldst the mistress
woo.

RAHAB

(*imperiously*).

Enough, Zuleika. Ammon, make him dumb;
His words defile.

AMMON.

So, die, thou dog.

[*Stabs HOREB. As the latter falls,*
RAHAB *with her hand to her*
heart sinks into a seat.

He's done.

Such deeds are nought to do for thee, for thee,
Empress of passion, royal Rahab!

[*Tries to embrace her.*

RAHAB.

Fly!

Dally not here. Thy post is at the walls.

Jericho calls!

[*After a moment's hesitation, he*
rushes forth, down the wall,
into the city.

RAHAB (*taking Salmon's gift from her bosom*).

The pearl gleams white; still white
My thought of him! Salmon, our secret's safe!

[*She sits, right. ZULEIKA stands*
with knit brows, looking down
at the dead body of HOREB.

RAHAB

Again the music plays the minor strain from Rahab's song, with triumph in it, yet unrest and struggle.

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

And it came to pass on the seventh day that they arose early, about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city. . . . And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city. 'And the city shall be accursed, even it and all that are therein; only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

JOSHUA vi. 15-17.

ACT III.

THE scene is Rahab's living room as in Act I., on the morning of the last day of the siege. The fountain, which was playing before, is silent. From the city come sounds of the siege; at intervals the clash of weapons, thud of battering rams, and trumpet peals, all toned down by the distance. As the curtain rises, ZULEIKA enters from the left rapidly, and goes to the latticed opening, peering forth; then she goes to ASENATH, who lies on the floor, cowed and frightened by the ominous sounds from the city.

ZULEIKA.

The clangour of spears is keen! My little bird,
Fret not, thy mother's here, and Rahab, too.

[Enter RAHAB from the left, vibrant with excitement.]

RAHAB.

No sign of father yet? Hang out the cord;
It is the seventh day: it must be pendent
There from the lattice-work, plainsightedly,
For all the hosts to see.

ZULEIKA.

*[Takes cord from behind a curtain
which hangs before the door,
and busies herself tying it in a
conspicuous place in the win-
dow.]*

The wounded in the garden lie about
In writhen heaps; maimed by the missiles hurled
Over the walls, they groan and sicken and die.

RAHAB.

Poor riff-raff! My heart cradles them; and yet,
To die is little, unless Love change Life
Into enchantment.—Sister, thy cheek is pale.
Zuleika, fetch her food; she hath not broke
Her fast to-day.

ZULEIKA

(aside to RAHAB).

Already food grows scant,

But there is wine, and fruit. (*To ASENATH*)
Come, dew flower, come, Rahab would have
thee eat.

[*ZULEIKA bustles about the preparation of the fruit and wine, which are placed at a small hand table.*

ASENATH
(*plaintively*).

I watch and watch,
Until my sight burns like a ball of fire,
But can see little.—Will not father come?

RAHAB.

Verily, will he.—Thou must eat, and rest;
Thy lissome body sags for lack of sleep,
Thy fawn-eyes droop so heavy.

ASENATH.

I can rest
Beside thee, Rahab, anywhere.

RAHAB.

Dear heart,
We'll eat and drink. What wilt thou, tiny one?

Pomegranates? They are coloured like thy mouth.

[She waits on ASENATH, who partakes but languidly, and makes a pretext of eating herself. Then she goes to the window and looks forth again in evident anxiety. Sounds of increased tumult afar off.]

ZULEIKA

(going to the windows).

No sign of him! Thou peerest like an eagle.

RAHAB.

Yea, I am a she-eagle from her eyrie
Sweeping wide spaces with an unglad eye;
Wing-clipt, yet fain of air-adventure.—I
Must forth to seek my father, lure him here
In some-wise. Ere the sundown, shall the blast
Of trumpets blow, and riot trample red
Our white streets: he, a marked man of the
kingdom,
Slain like a common slave!

[*She joins ASENATH; ZULEIKA
busies herself in the rear, near
the window.*

When father comes,
We two must keep him, dear,—thou knowest
why!

Thou specially canst do it, for his love
For thee will draw him to our dwelling, sweet.
Promise to hold him by these dainty arms
Of daughter-like devotion.

ASENATH.

I will try.
But half afraid am I of father, for
His bluster and big oaths!

RAHAB.

Bravado that!
Beneath, is tender-heartedness.

ASENATH.

I know,
And I will strive my best: how horrible
Should father fail, not knowing the red cord
Our amulet!

RAHAB.

He cannot think my house
Inviolatè, like the palace of a King;
Nathless, his sure defence!

ASENATH.

His own are here;
He should be glad to come.

RAHAB.

My house of joy
A sanctuary for the driven one!
It passes belief, but danger levels all.
Even a leper has a roof that guards
From rains and crooked lightnings.

ASENATH.

Leper, thou?
How canst thou say it, Rahab!

RAHAB.

Yet I love:
My kin, my Salmon, and the sole great God
Of Salmon and my dream.—My father's right.
I am to him naught but a—Rahab, she
Of Jericho!

ASENATH.

Nay, Rahab of our name!
I hate these tauntings that engirt thy beauty
As serpents do a flower

*[ZULEIKA comes from the window,
and whispers to RAHAB.]*

RAHAB.

Sister, thou
Must go to mother. Rest thee; I may need
Thy sweet help later.

[ASENATH, accompanied by ZULEIKA, goes off left; ZULEIKA tarries a moment to speak to RAHAB.]

ZULEIKA.

Ammon hastens through
Thy cypresses!

RAHAB.

Bringing me precious tidings
Shall make the path more plain.

*[AMMON rushes on from right,
sword in hand.]*

Thou comest, Ammon,
Bearer of news! How goes the siege, and how
Prosper my father in the battle-press?

AMMON.

Evil our lot. Hardly I made my way
Amidst the frenzy; but my errand here
Is weighty.—Woe enough it is to leave
Our barrier bodies at the wall, and see
Cursed aliens conquer; but there's worse, and
worse
May come.

RAHAB.

What mean'st thou?

AMMON.

Jericho contains
Traitors, of her own folk, who plan to open
The gates by craft, and let those devils in
To kill, despoil, and burn.

RAHAB.

Art sure of this?

AMMON.

Sure as the sure damnation meted out
To the betrayer!

RAHAB.

What the motive?

AMMON.

Gold:

The pledge a part of all their spoils.

[*Angry sounds outside.* AMMON
goes to the window.

RAHAB

(*shaken with conflicting emotions*).

My deed—

Yet not my deed; for that my deed, I swear,
Was ordered of high God. No traitor I!
Gods of my race, was ever woman bound
In such fierce coil and counter-coil of Fate!
My father—this will crack his heart.

AMMON

(*returns from the window*).

He dies

Of the defenders first, after the King.

RAHAB.

Why didst thou come to me, why fleest thou not
Unto the palace, or amidst the bruit

Of arms, to warn my sire, that disgrace
May not embitter more this bitter day?

AMMON.

So much of trick and subterfuge prevails
Thorough the city, that I could not come
Within a crossbow shot of him; they fear
Treachery on every side, would deem that I
Was leaguered with the foes.

RAHAB

(suddenly).

Then I shall go!

AMMON.

Madness! Thou, a woman, move among
War-demons with red-shotted eyes?

RAHAB.

Love-driven,
Mere craven women dare as much as heroes;
And go I must.

AMMON.

My Rahab, stay with me;
For we are linked in one by love and death!

RAHAB

(imperiously).

Nay, be my friend; prate not of love in these
Last hours of blood and tears.

[She turns as if to go.

AMMON

(goes to window to prevent her).

Thou must not go!

RAHAB

(aside, moving away from him).

Salmon hath said that Jericho shall fall:
His God declared it: then, the city falls.
But in fair, open battle, not by craft!
The God of Israel must manage that!
And I must aid my father, his big heart
Shall never burst through me.

[Goes to AMMON.

AMMON.

Rahab, thy doom—

RAHAB

*(snatches up a veil which she winds about her
head).*

To the King's palace or the van of war!
I'll drag him here to safety, if it mean
Lies, tricks, unsexing me, or death itself,
So long as he be spared!

AMMON.

It cannot be:

Lo, Jericho is straitly shut; no man
Goes in or out; a mere maid compass it?

RAHAB.

No one so well as I.—Zuleika, come!

[ZULEIKA *hastens in*.

Watch well o'er Asenath and mother, they
Shall be my lures for father; he may come
To fetch them to a better hiding-place
Than my frail roof fronting upon the wall.
Ammon, I thank thee for thy news.

AMMON.

I go

Beside thee!

RAHAB.

Nay, 'tis mine to do this deed;

I must be free of guilt toward my kin,
To look e'en the Jehovah in the face! (*Aside.*)

AMMON.

But I would guard thee—every path is pregnant
With peril.

RAHAB.

Nay, a mightier than thee
Guards me and guides—give way! Father, to
thee!

*[She hurries forth by the window
on to the wall, and so down into
the city. AMMON and ZULEIKA
look after her from the lattice.]*

AMMON.

Divine daredevil! Look, she threads the path—
Reaches the gate and hurtles through
the street

That rocks with riot; on her head is borne
A jug of water—she's a water-girl,
Selling a cool salvation to parched lips. . . .

She'll never gain her sire! . . . Now, she
melts

In the multitude. . . .

ZULEIKA.

All prophecies miscarry;
My mistress dear is lost!

AMMON.

But who is yon,
The tall, fair warrior? . . . He bears his
sword

Right soldierly, and seems to draw this way.
His garb is strange. . . . By all our city's
shrines,
An Israelite!

[AMMON secretes himself behind a
pillar at the left; ZULEIKA goes
off opposite. Enter SALMON,
by the window, looking swiftly
around in search of RAHAB.

SALMON.

Not here? The cord is hung.
She cannot be gone forth!

AMMON.

He knows her house?

She harbours Israel?

[He discloses himself.]

What wouldst thou here?

SALMON.

I seek the mistress Rahab: haply thou

Canst help me.

AMMON.

What hast thou to do with her?

Why Israel again?

SALMON

(aside).

Again?

AMMON.

Not yet

Our walls are down; back to thy fellow-dogs;

Or draw, and die!

SALMON.

I come not here to brawl,

Rather to help, to save. If thou dost know

Where Rahab bides, I pray thee, tell me now,
And take large thanks.

AMMON.

So thou wouldst look upon
The lady Rahab?

*[Mutterings swell into loud cries
from beyond the wall: "The
red cord, tear it down!"]*

Hark, they know her sign!

SALMON.

Her sign? What say'st thou?

AMMON

(with marked insolence).

Every trade may flaunt
Some emblem: "Ho! here's rest, refreshment
too,
For man and beast at Rahab's wayside
inn.
Come one and all."

SALMON

(fingering his sword).

This passes patience, sir!

AMMON

(mockingly).

A myriad pities!

*[The cries are redoubled: "Rahab,
pull down the cord." "Ammon,
Ammon, the idler, the traitor,
kill him!"*

Gods! the rabble raves

In a sheer frenzy! They would glut their rage
On her and me!

SALMON

(turns to explore the house).

Find her I will, forthright.

AMMON.

Thou wottest not the house, good Israelite;
The women's quarters privy are to thee,
While all to me is like an open hand,
Known day—and night!

SALMON.

I would not foul her house
By killing thee!

AMMON.

How kind and courteous !
I'll tell thee then, Rahab hath late gone forth,
The bird is flown, empty the gilded cage,
Bootless thy quest.

SALMON.

By Abraham's bosom, no !
Not forth amidst the slaughtering ! She hung
The red cord, then went forth ?

AMMON.

A signal that
To call thee, Jew ? I'll twist it round thy neck.

*[He goes to the lattice to pluck the
cord from it; AMMON blocks
the way, and draws his sword.]*

SALMON.

Touch but the cord : I run thee through.

AMMON.

My blood
Needs letting.—Faugh ! A signal to a foe !

SALMON.

A signal to all Israel, cur! to spare
Her and her house.

[They fight; SALMON disarms AMMON, and closes with him; the shouts beneath are repeated: "Rahab, the cord; we would have her and Ammon!" Gradually SALMON forces AMMON near to the window, through it, and by a supreme effort, hurls him over the wall. A great shout goes up from the crowd below.]

SALMON

(leaning, breathed, against the lattice and looking down at the mob).

A brave man, though a foe: a fearful fate!
Mere offal midst of unclean animals.

[Puts his hand before his eyes.]

Her splendour dazzles when I shut mine eyes,
And see her in my dream. There was a way

Her hair grew off her neck; the blended beauty
 Of burnished locks and living flesh;—I swear
 By all our altars, by the sacred ark
 Of God, that same slim neck did beckon me
 Through all the warlike web of Israel's fate,
 And made of the grim work a golden wonder!

[*Cries outside: "Rahab, Rahab!
 Seize her, seize her!" Then a
 piercing woman's shriek. SAL-
 MON looks forth again.*

'Tis she they seek to stay her . . .
 she escapes

Is here!

[*RAHAB, breathless, her garments
 torn, rushes on to the wall, and
 through the window.*

RAHAB.

'Tis thou, Salmon! The siege is o'er?

SALMON.

Nay, love, I scaled the wall, and sought thee, lest
 Thy heart should fail thee; would make sure the
 cord

Was hung, thy kinsfolk safe; and more than all,
Read in thine eyes again, O mistress mine,
A shining welcome!

[Eagerly approaches her.]

RAHAB.

Stay, Lord Salmon. Love
Sits not with present peril. I obeyed
God's mandate, saved thy life, betrayed my
birthplace;
But now, when I behold it in sore straits,
Something within me, deep at my soul's core,
Cries out against it, and my native land
Seems lovely in destruction—loved too late!

[She is shaken with sobs.]

SALMON.

God's will, dear Rahab; and He knows each
heart,
Judges our doings not by what appears
Before our fellows, but by what we strive
To do. . . . What of thy kinsfolk? Are
they all
Housed safely?

RAHAB.

Still my father heads the troops,
Heartens the King. I have but now returned
From a vain hope: to win him here.—Should he,
My grand old sire, die, then murder lies
'Twixt me and thee, my one white love is dyed
Deep crimson.

SALMON.

Die he shall not! I'll away
And seek him, drag him here, if needs.

RAHAB.

Not so.

Strong is my faith he'll come to fetch the others,
My sister and my mother, to some place
He deems is danger-proof.

SALMON.

He is not doomed
To die; I feel it in my soul.—O Sweet,
Between swift lanes of arrows have I run
Merely to look upon thy face again.
Their snarling was a very song to me

That seemed to say, the while they clove the air:
 "This path to her; speed on!"

RAHAB

(with a tremulous smile).

Thou art a poet.
 Help me to save my father! Thy reward,
 The turbulent woman in whose heart there
 strive
 A thousand passions—thine the last, and best.
 Uplift me with thy love.

SALMON.

God bring it so!
 The father-love thou showest is to me
 Beautiful; so my people love their own,
 And I foresee but holier harmony
 Between us twain, in that thou guardest him
 Even as thyself.

RAHAB.

Is this the final day
 Of Jericho, dear, sinful city? Stands
 The prophecy?

SALMON.

Those lofty battle-birds,
The trumpets of our leader, shall ring forth
Their brazen menace ere the sun be set,
And these so mighty walls go down in dust,
A miracle!

RAHAB.

Marvellous thy works of war.

SALMON.

Armed men fore-lead our priests; and following
after,
The ark: and then the rereward last of all.
So circle they the city seven times,
Ere the trumps blow their blast.

RAHAB.

In after years,
Men's lips shall pity Jericho, and curse
Rahab, the self-same breath!

SALMON.

Nay, love of mine,
A curse is on the city, but thy name

Is destined to be chanted praisefully
So long as faith is famed.

RAHAB.

At least, I save
My mother, who forgets my erstwhile guilt,
My little sister of the lamb-like ways,
And—grant it, God!—my father—who comes
not!

*[Goes to window, and looks to the
city.]*

SALMON

(drawing her away).

I came to comfort thee—to feed mine eyes
Upon thy face that blooms a passion-flower
Imperially set upon a hill;
A rose of Jericho, whose odorous buds
Bear this town's name beyond the Red Sea's
rim!

RAHAB.

Salmon, thy love re-makes me. In my days
Of girlhood, I would sometimes sudden stand
And hear about me, like an elusive voice,

The rapture of the wide world's wordless things:
 The winds and waters, and the bird-filled sky,
 The tiny caravans that haunt the grass
 Of Summer, and God's ancient gold, the
 stars . . .

Then, sins came flocking and I heard it not,
 That mystic call. Of late, the Spirit again
 Of sun-bright days and nights of silver moons
 Speaks to me, and I take it for a sign
 My soul awakens.

SALMON.

Dear, my soul is glad.
 Rest in my love. Farewell; I come again
 With Israel's triumph-song, to claim mine own!
 [He kneels to kiss her hand. The
 King's trumpet is heard close
 outside. RAHAB rushes to the
 window.

RAHAB.

'Tis the King's trumpeter. He comes, he
 comes—

My father! . . . Now be thanked my Gods,
and thine!

Let him not see thee, it would craze his soul
To meet a foe, with ruin at his gates.
Dear Salmon, for my sake, leave not my house.
Tarry thou here a little.

*[Conducts him to the left entrance,
places him behind the curtain
and claps her hands for ZU-
LEIKA, who comes in at left.]*

Father comes;

Call in the others.

*[Exit ZULEIKA, returning with
ASENATH and AMORAH.]*

May the fates be kind,
In this great hour that makes or mars us all!

*[NATHANIAH comes in unattended,
by the way of the wall: looks at
RAHAB, then goes to the other
women, showing special tender-
ness for ASENATH.]*

AMORAH.

Husband, unharmed! Is't well with Jericho?

NATHANIAH

(sombrely).

Jericho totters,—not because of dreams!
But that corruption eats into her heart
And makes her battle-feeble. Just beyond
The walls is Israel; within, gaunt hunger
Begins to stalk with hollow eyes; the rabble,
Vomited from a city's lairs of vice,
Mutter and growl and threat: each moment
here

Hinders my duty. Come ye, now, with me,
For I will hide ye where, whate'er betides,
Lust shall not break thy peace. No harbour
this

For soldiers and their kind. Now hot-foot hence,
I sin in coming for ye.

ASENATH.

Father, no;

Let us not leave this house,—'tis safer here.
Our tower of strength is Rahab.

AMORAH.

Yea, mayhap

Our elder daughter—

NATHANIAH.

Daughter! Name her not.

Fold Asenath from harm and keep her close

Till she hath left the house: this is no spot

For virgins. I will go into the garden

To choose our readiest way—and then we'll
forth

Together.

RAHAB.

Hold! They must not go, nor thou;

Let me but leave the place; I am loath to make

It noisome for thee; but do beg thee, sir,

Seek not the terrible outer ways!

NATHANIAH

(with emotion).

My lease

Of life runs out: my bones shall bleach in the
sun,

My body feed the jackals. What of that?

Why live without a country? Better lie
 Among the stark and undistinguished dead;
 In that gaunt company I shall not hear
 The ribald flout thy name: "The gold-won
 Rahab,
 Look, 'tis Nathaniah's daughter!"

RAHAB.

Father mine,
 Thine anguish kills me; think me not—

NATHANIAH.

— Now peace!
 Thou froward one! Our councils are not thine.
 (To the others.)

I carry papers of the King; designs
 That show the windings of our treasure-house.
 I must entrust them to my master. Come,
 Thy veils, thy veils!

[Mutterings again heard below.]

ZULEIKA

(who has been watching at the window).

Mistress, the people murmur.

They ask the meaning of the cord that dangles
The lattice down.

[She returns to the window,

NATHANIAH

(turns and sees it).

Some colour-frippery!

Or is it for a lure to gather here
Thy lovers?

RAHAB.

It repels mine enemies,
And thine, O father.

NATHANIAH.

Folly from a fool,
As juices from the betel nut! Make haste. *(To
the other women.)*

ASENATH.

If they should kill thee, father, we are left
Alone.

NATHANIAH.

Two women and a heap of words!
No more of this—away!

ZULEIKA

(coming from the window).

She speaks but truth.

Our house alone is safe: the seething mob
Spit out their hate, demand the Israelites
They fancy here; mere beasts that pant for
blood,
No sense of friend or foe.

NATHANIAH

(striding towards window).

One word from me

Will still their clamour.

[Gazes on mob. Hoarse cries of
"RAHAB, the cord," etc.]

Pull the bauble down;

It maddens them.

He tries to detach it.

RAHAB

*(rushes to him, and climbs lattice, making the
cord secure).*

The signal stays, our lives
Hang by that slender line!

NATHANIAH.

Be headstrong then.

Befuddle thee with dreams and conjurers.

Keep the girl with thee; I am for the King.

RAHAB

(aside to ASENATH).

Implore him: when he takes thee to his arms,

Get thou the papers hidden in his breast.

NATHANIAH.

Do thou, Amarah, watch thy younger child

As the great leopard cat her offspring.

ASENATH

(rushing to him).

Father, thou wilt not leave us!

*[While he embraces her, she gets
the papers.]*

NATHANIAH

(softened).

Little one,

All will be well, and thou be cherished soft;

But go I must.

RAHAB

ASENATH

(going to RAHAB).

I have them!

RAHAB *(seizing the papers, casts them into the
jaws of the image of the god Moloch,
whence flames issue).*

My soul sings!

Father, thou goest to assist the King:
The papers to deliver. Give them me,
And I will do it.

NATHANIAH

*(feels instinctively in his bosom, and misses
papers).*

Robbed! Wanton, by thee?

RAHAB

(opens her arms wide before him).

'Rend me apart, and all that's mine!

NATHANIAH.

No matter;

I'll forth, if but to die!

ZULEIKA

*(rushes from the window down to the others
with a wild cry).*

Oh, what is this!

[A wonderful great noise of trumpets and shouting, and the fall of mighty stones, as the walls of Jericho go down. Then rises clear above it all the victor-song of the children of Israel. During the song, a lurid light plays over the city.]

VICTOR SONG.

The Lord is a Man of War,

The Lord is his name.

Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously.

All the inhabitants of Canaan are melted away,
Terror and dread fall upon them.

By the greatness of thine arm they are as still as a stone.

Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously.

[With a choral swell.]

Jehovah, Jehovah, Jehovah!

*[All are moved and dazed. Then
NATHANIAH shakes off his stu-
por.*

NATHANIAH.

Fallen? All lost! And I was cooped up here.—
Women! But I will go to welcome death,
Not wait it here!

*[Is hastening to window: RAHAB
throws herself before him.*

RAHAB.

Salmon, I summon thee!

*[SALMON steps forth from the cur-
tain.*

Seize on this man, chief councillor to our King;
Let him not flee!

*[From both sides, and in through
the window, begin to pour the
dark-garbed Israelites with sav-
age looks and gestures. A sign
from SALMON quells them.*

SALMON

(gravely, going to NATHANIAH).

I hold thee, noble sir,
An enemy of Israel.

NATHANIAH.

And betrayed
By mine own child, under her roof of sale!

RAHAB

(radiantly).

Saved by thy child, beloved, and by one
His country's leader.

SALMON.

And her lover-leal.

[To his soldiers.

Lions ye are in Jericho's proud streets,
Prey-hungry: here be lambs. The city dies,
The only remnant, Rahab and her kin.

[To NATHANIAH.

Good sir, thine honour, and thine house's honour
Shall be perpetual.

RAHAB.

My lord, my love!

*[He seeks to embrace her: she holds
him off.*

But O my country's shame! Divided gladness!
 I walk to joy above my people's graves!
 My destiny is sombre. . . . Once again
 The dream, the vision!

*[As she recites, the motif of
 Rahab's Song is heard once
 more, passing into a triumphant
 major.]*

Hear the words: "By faith
 The harlot Rahab perished not with them
 That believed not, when she had received the
 spies
 With peace." The voice uplifts me. (To SAL-
 MON.) Be thy God
 My God. I leave the old bad life behind,
 An outworn garment.

SALMON.

Mine to aid thee, sweet;
 "Beneath the cypresses, under the stars!"

RAHAB (*taking pearl from her bosom and
 kissing it*).

The pearl shows no discolour from my breast.

**Out of the house of bondage, out of Passion,
To love and light.**

SALMON.

Rahab, of Israel!

CURTAIN.

Hale's Dramatists of To-day

Rostand, Hauptmann, Sudermann,
Pinero, Shaw, Phillips, Maeterlinck

By PROF. EDWARD EVERETT HALE, Jr., of Union
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